



What's So Special About Siddhachalam

The Significance of Siddhachalam in the History of Jainism

By Jaipat Singh Jain

A FREQUENT observation of yatris to Siddhachalam is that they find peace and calm here. “There is something special about this place,” note many a yatri. “I like to come here again and again.” A song composed by a devotee has a line that says: “...dhyaan se dekho Guru milenge Siddhachalam ke karn-karn main” (search and you will find the Guru here in every grain).

Every once in a while, we receive a yatri who narrates, or a letter from an ashram resident or yatri from many years ago that relates, a miracle-like experience involving Guruji. These constantly tease the curious. Then there is a legion of those who have a special relationship with Siddhachalam. Like an admirer who comes every Sunday or an old-time ashram resident who sends a fixed check every month, each for as long as one can remember. And thanks to personal coincidences that are too numerous to relate here, even skeptics like me have over the years become a faithful.

A transformative moment for me came during one of my weekend explorations of our forested areas. This occurred before the trails were reopened to the public. There was something special about that area. It drew me in again and again, including on weekdays. I might enter it in a confused state of mind but would invariably find repose and resolve. It soon became my favorite area. On enquiry, I learned that Guruji frequently meditated here. For me, what followed was a restless period of further enquiry followed by confirmation. The area has since then been reopened to yatris and is called “Guruji’s Tapasya Sthal.” A life-size pratima of Guruji sits on a beautiful trail close by.

All this make one pause and wonder: what's so special about Siddhachalam? As times roll by and those with first-hand experience of being with Guruji gradually recede, is it possible that the significance of Siddhachalam to the modern history of Jainism might be lost to many? That would be unfortunate.



While on his way to Rajagraha from Surabhupura, Bhagwan Mahavira had to cross the river Ganga in a boat. Serpent prince Sudamstra bore a grudge against Bhagwan Mahavira, as the serpent prince – who was then a lion – was killed by Bhagwan Mahavira, in one of the previous births. In order to have his revenge, the serpent prince creates a terrible cyclonic storm by his magical powers. The boat is rocked by the huge waves of the river Ganga, the mast is broken and pandemonium prevails everywhere. But Bhagwan Mahavira remains seated calmly and serenely, deeply absorbed in meditation. Two gods of nether regions, Kambala and Sambala, knew it by their divine power and rushed to the spot. They drove away Sudamstra and the storm subsided. All aboard the boat bowed down to Him with great respect and gratitude, as they were convinced they owed their lives to the presence of the great saint. *Plate 31, Tirthankar Bhagawan Mahavira Illustrated, Munishri Yashovijayji Ma Sa. Copyright Jain Chitrakala Nidarshan Samiti 1974. Reproduced with permission.*

Guruji Opens Doors

Notwithstanding references in literature to Bhagwaan Mahavira having crossed river Ganga by a boat, of Jain mendicants and scholars having traveled to distant lands in the first millennium after Bhagwaan Mahavira, and of ancient Jain temples in those lands, mendicants' travel by vehicles was forbidden. It was a time-honored tradition. Jain mendicants routinely walked thousands of miles. The tradition resulted in many auspicious consequences, including the greater opportunity for mendicants to reflect, and of lay people to meet with them in their local surroundings.

For his decisions, Guruji drew inspiration from great saints of the past such as Manidhari Shri Jinchandrasuriji Maharaj (Dada Guru) and Roop Chandji Maharaj. Guruji said that he often communicated with Dada Guru in the course of his meditations. In a video recording available at Siddhachalam, Guruji says that Dada Guru instructed him to travel outside India and spread the message of Bhagwaan Mahavira. Guruji, it seems, initially resisted the instructions. At that time, Guruji was an enormously respected monk, not just by Jains but by all, including successive prime ministers and presidents of India. Traveling by air outside the country could result in excommunication by some among the Jain community. Yet, for too long, the message of the Arihants had remained largely shut to the outside world. Also, the institution founded by Bhagwaan Mahavira comprised of monks, nuns, laymen and lay women. Yet, hundreds of thousands of Jains had migrated to foreign lands and there was no mendicant amidst them.

On June 17, 1975, at the height of his popularity, Guruji made the fateful decision to travel outside India by use of an aircraft. **That solitary act is probably the most significant event in the history of Jainism in modern times.** It opened doors to many monks and nuns using mechanical means of travel, including outside India.

During his travels, Guruji helped found many organizations and communities across the globe that engage in promoting ahimsa and anekantvad (the thinking that no one has monopoly over truth and that our notion of truth depends on standpoint). In the tradition of great teachers and saints, Guruji generated in all, regardless of sect or faith, a profound love and respect for ahimsa, brotherhood and desire to grow spiritually. His manner of communication was simple, direct and practical. His message, it seems, did not need the crutches of sophistry or scholarship for it was based on truths he had personally experienced and realized as a great yogi and saint.

Siddhachalam Tirth

Siddhachalam, Guruji said, is the place he had seen in his vision when he was around 15 years old.¹ In his vision, he saw a place where he would cause to be built many temples.²

More than four decades later, in 1983, the site of present-day Siddhachalam was an abandoned Jewish deaf children's camp. It was also, we learn, a site of the civil war. For Guruji, however, it seems, it was a laboratory to conduct his study and tapasya on the Namokar Mantra and to create a teerth (a pilgrimage place) where monks and nuns could come in the future.

Soon after founding it, Guruji explained as follows:

I saw a dream when I was a child. I was constructing a beautiful temple in a beautiful place on a small hill. Siddhachalam was that place. I saw this when I was 15-years-old. Roop Chandji Maharaj appeared to me at that time. I was sitting on a river bank.

But this place wants sacrifice. The land has already taken the sacrifice of so many people. Long ago it was a battlefield. Much blood was shed. In the past, people fought among themselves. But now, we will fight with inner enemies as Lord Mahavira did. We must sacrifice our comforts, devote our time and work hard.³

Guruji made Siddhachalam an ashram for all who believed in ahimsa, regardless of sect or faith. He also made it a protected land for animals, birds and nature. That tradition continues. In the winter of 2010, Siddhachalam fed more than 25,000 pounds of corn and made available warm drinking water to deer and other animals. It maintains several bird feed stations. All animals, including wild animals, have unimpeded access and protected living in Siddhachalam's 120-acres of picturesque land. For Guruji, Siddhachalam belonged to all, not just humans.



Picture by Vivek Jain

Nestled amidst rolling fields, lush forests, natural springs and ponds, Siddhachalam today comprises temples, residence for visiting monks and nuns, library, cabins for temporary stay for worshippers, congregation hall, community dining hall, nature and meditation trails, and play grounds.

Siddhachalam reflects Guruji's grand vision in many ways. The main temple (picture at beginning of this article), for instance, has unornamented and magnificent marble idols of Lord Adinath, Lord Parasvsnath, Lord Mahavira, Lord Chandraprabhu, and Lord Shantinath on one altar. Yet, two of the idols are in the Digambar Jain tradition and three in the Shwetambar Jain tradition. The temple is thoughtfully made to draw even those who reject idol worship.

Song of the Soul

Ever since a child, as a protégé of Chotelalji Maharaj, a Jain monk, Guruji experimented with the Namokar Mantra.⁴ He found in it immeasurable powers to cure, heal and protect. That started in him a life-long quest to realize the secrets behind the Namokar Mantra. That quest reached fruition at Siddhachalam.

In the Song of the Soul, a book he wrote on the Namokar Mantra while at Siddhachalam, Guruji writes: "...The Namokar Mantra is my goal and my life. It is my love and my destiny. Through it, I can serve and guide along the path of non-violence."⁵ He adds: "There is a deep, secret science to the combination of sounds [in the Namokar Mantra]. Specific syllables are seeds for the awakening of latent powers. Only the person who has actually experienced this level of reality, can fully understand the science of letters [matrika vidya]. Thus, the Namokar Mantra is a treasured gift of humanity of inestimable worth for the purification, upliftment and spiritual evolution of everyone."⁶

"The Namokar Mantra," Guruji writes in the Song of the Soul, "is the essence of the gospel of the Tirthankars...They have taught the complete knowledge of the esoteric science of letters describing the special powers of each vowel and consonant. Subsequently, the Tirthankars' chief disciples, known as Ganadharas, have used this precious knowledge to actually form a mantra by combining letters and their sounds and powers for the most beneficial effect...For every era, the Namokar Mantra has taken a different form, but its essence has remained the same. As only a Ganadhar is qualified to combine sounds as taught by the Tirthankar, no one else can change the form of the mantra without distorting it."⁷

The secrets of the mantra, explains Guruji in one of his talks, were lost to humanity with the passage of time. Every once in a while, however, there comes a saint who, through his recollections from past lives and yogic powers, rediscovers the secrets. Guruji, it seems, did just that. **It was at Siddhachalam that Guruji more fully perfected his understanding of the science of sound behind the Mantra and shared some of those secrets with ashram residents and other disciples.** Soon, Siddhachalam came to be called a *teerth*, a place of pilgrimage.

The Song of the Soul is a small but rare manuscript by a practitioner who realized, practiced and taught the secrets of the Namokar Mantra. The book is not in the mold of a typical work of scholarship. Instead, it is a narration of methods to purify oneself, as explained by a self-realized master. The words, phrases and sentences encapsulate direct knowledge acquired through personal experience.⁸

“You Can Accomplish Anything Here”

In times to come, Guruji’s immediate disciples would no longer be with us. Nor would others who experienced first-hand the many miracles attributed to him. Even so, Siddhachalam will remain full of life, joy and hope. Many of us will not know why this place brings so much peace and joy. They will likely not know the legends behind the place or its significance. But as Guruji said:

“There is a powerful vibration here. Ultimately, the situation at Siddhachalam will be that when anyone [true seeker] comes here, he will get enlightenment.

I will do some work perfectly; I know what the result will be. Whether the Guru sits here or not, whether anyone gives suggestion or not, kundalini will awaken. This will be the situation, and I will do this in my lifetime and yours.

You can accomplish anything here. You can meditate and you will get success. You can do business and you will get success. And you can play. The time is coming.”⁹

¹ When I was Fourteen or Fifteen, Acharya Sushil Kumarji Maharaj, 1998, page 4.

² This might appear surprising to some because Guruji was a monk in the *sthanakvasi* tradition. *Sthanakvasi* reject veneration of images. Guruji, however, was an iconoclast in the tradition of great reformers. Seventeen years after Guruji left his human body, his dream of many temples has further blossomed with Siddhachalam seeking to replicate Shikharji.

³ Siddhachalam Newsletter, December 3, 1983.

⁴ Guruji was born on June 15, 1926 in Sikhopur (later named Sushilgarh in his honor) in Haryana, India. When seven year’s old, he left home to join Muni Chotelal Maharaj. When 15-year-old, he became a Jain monk. Guruji obtained academic degrees of Shastri, Acharya, Vidya-Ratna, and Sahitya-Ratna. However, his considerable yogic powers were realized through direct experience, meditation, and through recollections from past lives. Guruji left his human body on April 22, 1994. Guruji has no successor.

⁵ Song of the Soul, page 14. Copyright Siddhachalam, 1987.

⁶ *Id.*, at 23.

⁷ *Id.*, at 22-23.

⁸ The Song of the Soul is available at negligible or no cost at Siddhachalam.

⁹ *Id.*, note 3 above.